

Sermon for Proper 22C  
Sunday, October 2, 2016  
“Mustard seed faith”

Text: Luke 17:5-10

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the classic movies of all time is *The Wizard of Oz*. It happens to be one of my favorites, too. I imagine most of you have seen it. As the story goes, Dorothy accidentally gets caught inside the house of her aunt and uncle during a tornado. Suddenly the house with Dorothy and her dog, Toto, is sucked up into the tornado and then dropped into the colorful, magical Land of Oz. The rest of the movie is about her trying to get back home. Nobody in Oz knows how to get Dorothy back home to Kansas, which no one has even heard of. They suggest that she travel to the Emerald City to see if the great Wizard could help her, so off she goes down the yellow brick road, wearing a pair of ruby slippers magically placed on her feet by Glinda, the Good Witch of the North. Along her journey, she meets a scarecrow who desires a brain, a tin man who longs for a heart, and a cowardly lion who covets courage. Together they set off for the Emerald City and face a number of challenges along the way, thanks to the wiles of the Wicked Witch of the West who wants her ruby slippers. When they finally get to the Emerald City, they meet the Wizard and tell him their stories. Although the Wizard turns out to be an imposter with no special powers, he has great wisdom and insight, and opens their eyes to reveal to them that they already possessed the qualities that they were searching for. The very things they thought they lacked in themselves were the very gifts that helped lead them to where they ended up. Even Dorothy, who thinks her chance of returning to Kansas has blown away when the Wizard’s hot air balloon accidentally drifts away, leaving her and Toto on the ground below—even Dorothy was made aware, thanks to Glinda, that she had the ability to return home all along. The power to return was contained in the ruby slippers she was wearing. The story is a metaphor for our experience in life, that all we need to live life’s journey is within ourselves.

The gospel lesson for today tells us the same thing: we already possess within ourselves the faith to move mountains. The gospel lesson for today is about discipleship. The passage finds itself in Luke’s Gospel within a long discourse about what it means to be a good disciple that

Jesus was teaching to his disciples while they were *en route* to Jerusalem. We've been going through the parables of this long discourse for the past several weeks, including the lesson we read last week about Lazarus and the rich man—a lesson that reminded us that good discipleship involves recognizing that God dwells in all of us and that we are all the image of God. Today's gospel is sandwiched within several short statements of Jesus in which he says 1) that we should not be the cause of someone else's sin; 2) forgive again, and again, and again; and, 3) discipleship is not about reward—discipleship is something we just do. Today's statement is that even a miniscule faith is sufficient.

The disciples simply and bluntly asked Jesus to increase their faith, and his reply was equally simple and blunt: you have more than enough. If you had even the faith of a mustard seed, you could move mountains. Who here has seen a mustard seed? Well, I'll tell you, it is a very tiny seed—a little bigger than a poppy seed on a bagel. Of course, faith doesn't come in quantifiable packages; it's something either you have or you don't. That is point that Jesus was trying to make; the disciples asked for Jesus to increase their faith. They were thinking about faith in quantifiable terms. Perhaps a better question to ask Jesus would have been for him to *strengthen* their faith, to make their faith more effective. Jesus reminded them that the faith they needed was already within themselves; they already had enough to move mountains, if they really believed.

The disciples' question immediately follows Jesus telling them to forgive as many times as necessary, even seven times in a single day, so perhaps they were feeling inadequate, that they couldn't live up to such a tall order and they desired that Jesus give them strength to manage successfully such a tall order. That's something we can relate to. We hear many, many sermons about good discipleship. We preach many, many sermons about good discipleship. We say things like, "forgive everyone," "love everybody, even your enemies," "give to the poor," "see God in all persons," "see God in every living creature," "love God's creation." There are many ways that we spin the message of good discipleship, and each example, at least the way Jesus presents it, seems to be too much for our sinful selves to be able to do. And that's exactly what Jesus was trying to get the disciples to recognize, and exactly what we're to take away from today's short passage. Yes, we're sinful. Yes,

we're imperfect. Yes, we mess up ourselves, but nevertheless—nevertheless, we have all the faith we need to strive toward God's tall order of discipleship. We're definitely not there yet, and we will never fully achieve it in this lifetime, but we have to keep trying. We have to keep striving.

It's all too easy for us to lament about what we lack, when all God asks is that we recognize the gifts that he has already given us. We often find ourselves like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* who longed to go home, when the power to return home was there all along. No matter how much faith we think we have, if we have any at all, we have enough to be the disciples God wants and expects us to be. We don't need to be like the disciples in asking for more, but we can ask God to renew, strengthen, and fortify what we already have. Then we can continue to strive to be the disciples that we so deeply desire to be. Amen.

#### Resources

“Commentary on Luke 17:5-10” in *The Working Preacher*,  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3028](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3028)